

Dear Ms. Peterson,

We attended the MBI meeting at UMass on Tuesday evening. Thank you for coming, and thank you for your gracious and even-handed moderating of the meeting.

My husband and I would like to add our voices to the chorus of people requesting urgent expansion of broadband access to EVERYONE in the state with reliable high-speed FIBER OPTIC connection. As has been pointed out repeatedly, good internet access is, in this age, as essential as electricity. It is needed for all aspects of life – banking, paying bills, registering a car, doing business, paying taxes, managing health care, buying things, tracking mail, researching information, scheduling appointments, doing homework – with options for doing these things differently shrinking rapidly.

It is amazing to us that the state's flagship university is in an area where many of its faculty and students have no or limited internet access.

We are residents of Montague with no access to broadband. We are fortunate that we at least have DSL, but that is slow and unreliable and is being phased out by Verizon. Lack of broadband is already impacting our ability to sell our house. It will drastically affect our community going forward, as people will not move to this area, will not open businesses or hold events or otherwise nourish the community without broadband access.

I am a physician. Medical care relies increasingly on the internet: for telemedicine, for patient monitoring, for charting in electronic medical records, for data collection, for quality control, for patient reminders and education, for engaging patients in their health care, and for all the business functions like scheduling and bill payment. Here is a brief comment about a recent survey: Current provider-facing telehealth programs will soon be replaced with mHealth tools that are more patient-focused, according to Avizia and Modern Healthcare's survey of almost 280 health care executives. Survey respondents identified computer workstations, telemedicine carts and "specialized telemedicine peripherals" as the most popular telemedicine devices they use. They said they anticipate using video visits through the EMR, consumer-facing apps, company-owned and personal mobile devices, FDA-approved biometric patient monitoring devices and consumer-grade monitoring devices in the future.

We urge you to reconsider your decision to grant funds to Comcast to extend its cable network in Montague, Hardwick, and Petersham. We feel strongly that this is a much inferior solution, with use of outdated technology and minimal increase in coverage, along with an established record of poor customer service and lack of cooperation with the towns. We need fiber optic connection, and we need it now.

Sincerely,

Anne and Bob Weaver
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Montague